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Quo Vadis Medieval Studies in Georgia?

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QUO VADIS MEDIEVAL STUDIES IN GEORGIA?

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CEU Medieval Studies appeared in my life in 1994 as a window on the strange, exotic world of the European Middle Ages, the epoch when religious faith, politics, and art were intertwined, forming a holistic world so different from ours. Being quite familiar with the Middle Ages of Eastern Christendom, I felt a kind of a joyful trepidation at getting acquainted with Western Christendom and making my own synthesis of the two; understanding the ancient roots of modern Europe; getting an in-depth understanding of how Georgia assimilates and differentiates itself from Europe; and deciding in what sense and how justifiably one can speak of Georgian culture as European. After years of study and teaching I still have a Socratic feeling of not having conclusive answers to these questions. The initial feeling – fed to be sure by the wonderful classes of the CEU professors – of exposure to something great and exotic that I had in my CEU years is still vivid in me.

When I returned to Georgia in 2000 I embarked headlong upon teaching Byzantine culture and literature at the Javakishvili State University Institute of Classical Philology, Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies. I could teach only BA classes, however, because my Medieval Studies PhD was not recognized by the Georgian academy. “Medievalist” was a non-existent profession. That is why, in order to teach courses on the MA level, I re-defended my CEU doctoral thesis and obtained a Georgian PhD in Philology in 2002. Subjects from medieval studies have been covered in Georgian universities by the departments of history, literature, art, and architecture, but until recently no separate discipline of Medieval Studies had been created.

Since 2003 Georgia has become a part of the Bologna process. The Bologna process with its emphasis on market-oriented studies, as one may have predicted, did not seem favorable for humanities studies in Georgia. However, this forecast was not fulfilled. The Bologna process is still only a façade in the academic life in my country; in fact, this process implies that students must have a certain assurance and hope that after successful studies they will be of a high demand for well-paid jobs. But no such assurances and hope exist among Georgian students; most of them still feel that well-paid jobs are not necessarily given to those who deserve them through good academic records at the Georgian higher institutions, but rather to those who have connections or been educated abroad. Paradoxically, I

think, exactly this apathy plays a positive role for the humanities in Georgia; being frustrated in “pragmatic,” market-oriented subjects, quite a few students choose to pursue non-pragmatic interests in humanities out of sincere curiosity and desire.

Among the other disciplines of humanities, Medieval Studies are of especial interest for young Georgians, perhaps because in the postmodern whirl they are trying to support their identity and get a fuller understanding of their ancestral roots and traditions. In fact, Georgia had a long Middle Ages that lasted until the eighteenth century and, indeed, a few aspects of the culture and ethos of Georgians could still be called “medieval” – with this word conveying both favorable and unfavorable connotations. Architecture, paintings and especially ancient manuscripts preserved in the State Institute of Manuscripts – most of which still await study and publication – provide ample opportunities for study and research; and since they are also of interest to Western scholars, their students have good chances to get involved in international projects, to get access to Western financial support, and so on. In this way, it would not be a mistake to say that humanities, Medieval Studies in particular, have no fewer prospects from the financial point of view than, for instance, such disciplines as banking or business administration – because there are fewer available jobs at Georgian banks than there are students who graduate with diplomas in banking or business administration. Thus, the humanities in Georgia have a chance to live up to objectives of the Bologna process perhaps more successfully than other, more “pragmatic,” disciplines.

How are the things today with regard to Medieval Studies? First, there are two chief higher academic institutions in Georgia that deal with humanities: Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and Ilia Chavchavadze Tbilisi State University. The first has the Institute of Classics, Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies. The subjects taught at the Institute cover Byzantine and – to a lesser extent – the Western Middle Ages. At the library of the Institute, where I started lecturing, Byzantine literature was at least represented, but it was a tiny fraction compared with the books connected with Ancient and Modern Greek. Through participation in several CEU Curriculum Resource Center sessions, with book allowances provided by this program, I was able to purchase a few important books in medieval – and particularly Byzantine – studies (among others, Kazdan’s three-volume dictionary of Byzantium); besides, over a few years many other books in Byzantine studies arrived at the library from various sources. That served as a ground for creating, with the financial support of Greek patrons of arts, a separate library of Byzantine studies at the Institute in February 2009. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University also has a department of Oriental Studies, which covers issues related to the Eastern Middle Ages. Two years

ago a joint project was launched by the Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and the Open Society Institute (Budapest): an MA course in Late Antique-Medieval philosophy/theology. CEU professors Istvan Perczel and Gyorgy Gereby have been to Tbilisi several times to deliver lectures in philosophy for this course. I have also taught a course on Paganism and Christianity in Late Antiquity especially for this project. The MA graduates enrolled in the project successfully defended their theses (on Plotinus, Proclus, Petritsi, etc.) in January 2009.

Since 2006 I have been working as an associate professor at the Ilia Chavchavadze State University – a new university that originated from the unification of the Institute of Foreign Languages and the Pedagogical Institute. This university is less bureaucratic than older ones and novelty is easier to introduced there. One of the most favorable novelties has been the establishment of the Center of Medieval Studies and the MA program in Medieval Studies. For the first time in Georgia, an MA graduate will have a qualification as a Medievalist. The center has gathered scholars of all age groups, among them four CEU Medieval Studies graduates Irma Karaulashvili, Natia Gabrichidze, Giga Zedania, and me. Giga Zedania has recently also become the dean of the faculty of humanities and one of his first initiatives was to try to connect the Medieval Studies program of our university with the Higher Education Support Program (HESP) of the OSI. Hopefully, this connection will be established. Moreover, independently from this initiative, the CEU Center for Hellenic Traditions proposed an ambitious three-year (2010/11–2012/13) project to HESP: “The Caucasus and Byzantium from Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages,” which is to involve academic institutions and scholars of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan as well as international scholars. The project covers a variety of topics (philosophy/theology, translations, manuscript studies, archaeology and art, numismatics, etc.) and envisages close cooperation of local Caucasian scholars working with Western scholars. The project is also planning on the participation of CEU Medieval doctoral students in the educational process of universities in Caucasus. Professor Niels Gaul and Cristi Daniel, a PhD student) recently visited Armenia and Georgia to see the academic situation on the spot. In the case of Georgia, the program developed and presented by Gaul provides for both Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University and the Chavchavadze Tbilisi State University scholars to participate, which is a very favorable model because both universities have commendable resources and can jointly contribute to this project.

I think, enough has been said concerning the issue of “Quo Vadis Medieval Studies of Georgia?” It is going in the right and promising direction, towards local development and greater exposure to and collaboration with international scholars.

Major Higher Insitutions:

Ilia Chavchavadze Tbilisi State University (www.iliauni.edu.ge)

Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University (www.tsu.ge)

G. Tsereteli Institute for Oriental Studies (includes department of Byzantine Studies).

Address: 3, Acad. G.Tsereteli St. 380062 Tbilisi Georgia Tel/Fax: (995 32) 29 09 25

Journals covering issues of Medieval Studies:

Christian Archeological Research. Ilia Chavchavadze State University, faculty of Humanities and Cultural Studies, Center of Studies in Christian Archeology (website: christian_archeology@iliauni.edu.ge)

Tsakhnagi (Facet) – Annual of philological studies. Tbilisi: Memkvidreoba (“Heritage”)

Byzantine Studies in Georgia (Website: <http://byzingeo2.org/?lng=eng&cp=home>)

Semiotika – Scientific Journal. Ilia Chavchavadze State University. Faculty of Humanities and Cultural Studies.

Phasis – Greek and Roman Studies. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University, Institute of Classical Philology, Byzantinology and Modern Greek Studies.

Some contributions of the last 10 years:

Ioane Petrizi. *Kommentar zur ‘Elementatio theologica’ des Proklos*. Übersetzung aus dem Altgeorgischen, Anmerkungen, Indices und Einleitung Herausgegeben von Lela Alexidze und Lutz Bergemann Tbilisi Javakhishvili State University / Humboldt-Universität, Berlin Bochumer Studien zur Philosophie 47 2009.

Alexidze, Lela. *Neoplatonic Philosophy: Plotinus and Iamblichus*. Tbilisi: Logos, 2009.

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Tevzadze, Guram. *Philosophy of Renaissance: From Marcilio Ficino to Jakob Boehme*. Nekeri: Tbilisi, 2008. (A follow-up to his *History of Medieval Philosophy*. Tbilisi State University Press: Tbilisi, 1996.)

Jugeli, Viktoria. *The Blessed Theodoric of Cyrus: His life, Activities, Belief, Works and their Georgian Translations*. Tbilisi : Logos:, 2008.

Gelukashvili, Joseph. *Unknown Sermon of Germanos of Constantinople*. Tbilisi, 2008.

Koromila, Marianna. *Greeks on the Black Sea: From the Bronze Era to the Beginning of XX century*. Tbilisi: Logos, 2008.

Mchedlidze, Magda. *Michael Psellos' Philosophical Position and Intellectual-Pedagogic Method*. Tbilisi: Logos, 2006.

Gigineishvili, Levan. *Platonic Theology of Ioane Petritsi*. Piscataway NJ: Gorgias Press, 2007.

Iremadze, Tengiz. *Konzeptionen Des Denkens Im Neuplatonismus. Zur Rezeption Der Proklischen Philosophie Im Deutschen Und Georgischen Mittelalter Dietrich von Freiberg – Berthold von Moosburg-Joane Petrizi*. Bochum: John Benjamins, 2004.

Melikishvili, Damana. *From the History of Old Georgian Philosophical-Theological Terminology*. Tbilisi: Javakhisvhili Tbilisi State University Press, 1999.